DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 334 959 HE 024 914

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TITLE	Social Consciousness and Career Awareness: Emerging Link in Higher Education. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	Association for the Study of Higher Education.; ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, Washington, D.C.; George Washington Univ., Washington, DC. School of Education and Human Development.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-HE-90-8
PUB DATE	Aug 91
CONTRACT	RI88062014
NOTE	3p.; For full report, see HE 024 794.
AVAILABLE FROM	ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Reports, George Washington University, One Dupont Circle, Suite 630, Washington, DC 20036-1183 ($1.00).
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Career Awareness; Citizen Participation; Citizen Role; *Citizenship Education; Citizenship Responsibility; Civics; Curriculum; *Government Role; Higher Education; *Public Service; Role of Education; *Social Responsibility; Student Attitudes; *Student Volunteers
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

This digest summarizes a full length report of the same title (HE 024 794) which discusses contemporary college students' apparent lack of understanding of citizenship and how it relates to positive career pursuits. A proposal is made to make students more aware of both the need for and the benefit of socially responsible citizens, and for engaging in volunteer service at the national level or as part of the undergraduate experience. The report discusses such programs as they relate to higher education including the role universities should play, the characteristics and desires of the contemporary college student; the level of financial and volunteer support currently exercised; student attitudes toward volunteering, and the appropriateness of national service programs currently under consideration in Congress. (JB)

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AUGUST 1991
EDO-HE-90-8

ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education The George Washington University One Dupont Circle, Suite 630 Washington, DC 20036

ED334959

Social Consciousness and Career Awareness: Emerging Link in Higher Education

by John S. Swift, Jr.

Authors of some educational reports written during the 1980s think contemporary college students lack exposure to citizenship and concern for others. The same authors think that the education young people receive does not teach them how to serve as involved citizens. Finally, the authors are convinced that the way to teach these vital matters is by making a period of volunteer service part of the college experience (Boyer 1986; Newman 1985).

What Is Higher Education's Responsibility?

Higher education's historical responsibility has been to educate people to be leaders and providers for the welfare of society (Rudolph 1962). Colleges and universities have said that one of their missions is service. But the creation and support of service programs by educational institutions is limited to date. Faculty often are thought of as unwilling to become involved in such activities, and administrators often fail to see the benefits for their institutions from service. There are, however, benefits for faculty and institutions by providing volunteer service programs (Astin 1987).

Are College Students Selfish?

A major reason educators want contemporary youths to volunteer is due to their apparent selfishness: Many attend college primarily to prepare to enter the job market. Students appear preoccupied with status, money, and power. They seem focused on getting ahead and have little interest in changing the conditions around them. They consider solving the problems of society the responsibility of government (Astin, Green, and Korn 1987). But the concern students have for themselves may reflect more than selfishness. It may reflect their reaction to the economic, political, and social times they live in today.

Does Society Give Money and Time to Help Others?

Researchers report that individuals give the greatest amount of money to support nonprofit organizations. But the amount of money given is not increasing as fast as the need. Individual support of volunteer organizations is lagging while the expectation that government and/or business will do so is growing (Pifer 1987).

Individuals also are depended upon to volunteer to assist others. While a majority of people believe it is the obligation of every citizen to give and do as much as each can, less than half do either. Of those who do give and volunteer, the greater their involvement in their communities, the more they donate and serve (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1988).

What Do Students Think About Volunteering?

A recent Gallup Poll on the value of voluntary national service found that 87 percent of those aged 18 to 24 believe it would be good for such a program to exist. Previous surveys have also found that a majority of young people favor a period of volunteer service, with 55 percent supporting conscription. Support of a period of service by youth also is favored by adults (Dolan 1986; National Service Secretariat 1988b).

Students who participate in volunteer programs report that the experience provides a variety of positive rewards. These include: knowledge, self-confidence, information about specific careers or academic majors, appreciation for being participatory citizens, and the opportunity to give back to society some of what society has given to them.

Student volunteers believe that their peers also would like the opportunity to volunteer. They do not believe that their generation is selfish. Rather, they believe that the problem lies in the inability of young people to find ways to serve society. They feel that service programs are needed (Fitch 1987).

Will Congress Legislate National Service?

Concern that youths need a service experience is great enough among Democratic legislators that in 1989 they introduced 20 bills to create a national service program. In addition, President Bush has proposed a national volunteer program. While his proposal includes no incentives, it also does not tie the receipt of financial aid to providing one or two years of service. Some proposed legislation requires those seeking financial aid to volunteer as a condition for aid (Kuntz 1989).

Any service program would need to be funded. One proposal for funding under consideration is to alter current federal budget line items including monies now going to education. Because some are convinced that students who serve should be rewarded, proposals for rewards include the granting of vouchers to pay for college education. The fund's source to

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pay those who serve could be the current financial aid programs in which at least one proposal would be eliminated.

Higher education is concerned about the potential impact changes in funding and the requirement of service will have. Some programs being conceived include requiring service for a one or two year period before a young person enters college. At the extreme, the impact could be significant; even a limited national service program will effect higher education (Danzig and Szanton 1986).

What Actions Should Higher Education Take?

Colleges and universities should take the lead in teaching youths about civic responsibility.

1. Curricular changes should be considered to teach youths the skills and knowledge needed to be participatory citizens.
2. Youths need opportunities to put classroom learning into practice. Students need service programming so they can volunteer, be exposed to social problems, and have the opportunity to solve those problems (MacArthur 1985).
3. Higher education should support altering the Federal Work-Study Program to provide opportunities for students to earn while serving others (Eberly and Sherraden 1982a; Newman 1985).
4. Programs need to be developed on campus, and/or with nonprofit agencies so students can participate in community service (Boyer 1986).

Service programming will require funding, and it is to the benefit of colleges and universities to seek support from foundations, individuals, and the government to create programs and new courses and to restructure the curriculum. Restructuring and the creation of new programs also means that faculty and staff need to become involved as participatory citizens. Faculty set examples, as do administrators.

Some colleges and universities, recognizing the need for a period of service for youth and the need for programs, have created both. National organizations have formed to facilitate student volunteers; for example, the Campus Outreach Opportunity League, a student organized group with chapters on 450 campuses. Another is the Campus Compact, an organization of 140 colleges and universities working under the direction of the Education Commission of the States. Both organizations provide a variety of services and support for institutions to create and operate volunteer service programs (Theus 1988).

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This ERIC digest is based on a new full-length report in the *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report* series, prepared by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education in cooperation with the Association for the Study of Higher Education, and published by the School of Education at the **George Washington University.** Each report is a definitive review of the literature and institutional practice on a single critical issue. Many administrators subscribe to the series and circulate reports to staff and faculty committees with responsibility in a report's topic area. Reports are available through subscriptions for $80 per year ($90 outside the U.S.). Subscriptions begin with Report 1 and conclude with Report 8 of the current series year. Single copies, at $17 each, are available from: *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Reports,* **The George Washington University,** One Dupont Circle, Suite 630, Washington, DC 20036-1183. Or phone (202) 296-2597.

This publication was partially prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. ED RI-88-062014. The opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or the department.

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